



November 22, 2019

Governor Greg Abbott  
Attention: Luis Saenz, Chief of Staff  
State Capitol Bldg.  
1100 Congress Ave., Room 2S.1  
Austin Texas, 78701

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL TO LUIS.SAENZ@GOV.TEXAS.GOV

Dear Governor Abbott:

On September 26th, 2019, President Trump issued Executive Order 13888, requiring the US Secretary of State and the Secretary of HHS to “develop and implement a process to determine whether the State and locality both consent, in writing, to the resettlement of refugees within the State and locality, before refugees are resettled within that State and locality under the Program.” A Notice of Funding Opportunity for refugee resettlement agencies states that the State Department will take into account whether consent has been provided as they make decisions about refugee placement, beginning on January 21, 2020, when proposals are due.

Fort Worth is proudly home to at least 3 agencies and non-profits who work as refugee resettlement agencies. As Mayor, I’ve witnessed the mutually beneficial impact of resettling almost 2,600 refugees in Fort Worth since 2016, I don’t want to risk fixing anything that is not broken. I have heard from supportive local employers and faith leaders who share my concern that refugees may no longer be permitted in Fort Worth and North Texas, potentially harming our economy and increasing the risk that refugees might not be placed with their Texas family members.

These refugee families are an important part of the diverse fabric of Fort Worth, and importantly, they become proud residents of Fort Worth and Texas, embodying our trailblazing and tenacious spirit. Their stories and path to the United States are now an important part of our own story in Fort Worth. Our refugee families have become local business owners, entrepreneurs, high-performing students in our schools and devoted community volunteers. While I am realistic that the annual number of refugees will decrease with President Trump’s new lowered 2020 cap, *I am writing to seek your consent that will enable refugees to continue resettling in Texas* under the Department of State’s Reception and Placement Program.

It’s my understanding from President Trump’s executive order, that your written consent to the U.S. Department of State is critical to any refugee resettlement agencies in Texas continuing this important work.

Attached with this letter you will also find some additional background information on this issue. We know your staff is familiar with this issue but wanted to pass along specifics provided from local

**BETSY PRICE, MAYOR**

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CITY OF FORT WORTH ★ 200 TEXAS STREET ★ FORT WORTH, TEXAS 76102  
(817) 392-6118 ★ FAX (817) 392-6187

agencies in Fort Worth. Thank you for the consideration and I am always more than glad to visit with you and your team to help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betsy Price". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Betsy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Price".

Betsy Price  
Mayor

Cc:

Michael P. Grace, CEO - Catholic Charities Fort Worth

Jen Smyers, Director, Policy and Advocacy - Church World Services

Russell A. Smith, CEO – Refugee Services of Texas

World Relief Fort Worth



## BACKGROUND:

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was created by Congress under the Refugee Act of 1980 and is managed by the Department of State/Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Since 1980, thousands of refugees have resettled across the United States with the help of local non-profit and faith-based organizations.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), a refugee is someone who has experienced past persecution or has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Unlike asylees, who arrive in the United States on their own, refugees selected for resettlement are screened, adjudicated and processed for resettlement overseas, prior to traveling to the United States. The Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and National Counter Terrorism Center conduct inter-agency vetting of all refugees resettled to the United States.

After a refugee case is approved for US resettlement, one of several resettlement agencies operating under a cooperative agreement with PRM must agree to sponsor the case before it arrives. The resettlement agency, which maintains a network of local affiliates throughout the US, places the case with a local affiliate responsible for providing initial Reception & Placement (R&P) services to new arrivals. The services include basic needs support (housing, furnishings, food and clothing), cultural orientation, and assistance with employment, health, and school enrollments.

One of the key factors in determining where a refugee is placed is whether they have family already residing in the US with whom they wish to resettle. A refugee's ability to integrate into their new community is greatly enhanced if they are reunited with family who can provide the necessary support as they adjust to their new home. Since a refugee does not have to remain in the initial placement area and can relocate at any time, resettling new arrivals with family helps to avoid secondary migration and losing access to the initial R&P services that are so vital to their self-sufficiency and long-term integration.

The initial resettlement of refugees in every community is carried out in close coordination with relevant local stakeholders. PRM's cooperative agreement with refugee resettlement agencies requires that in each placement location, the affiliate(s) responsible for refugee placement shall convene and conduct quarterly consultations with state and local government officials, including the state refugee coordinator; state refugee health coordinator; local governance (city and/or county, as applicable); and local and/or county public health, welfare, social services, public safety, and public education.

Although the Executive Order does "not apply to the resettlement of a refugee's spouse or child following to join that refugee pursuant to 8 U.S.C. 1157(c)(2)(A)," which is a program that accounts for less than five percent of arrivals, it does apply to the majority of refugee arrivals who have family residing in the US. If a state or locality does not provide written consent for refugee resettlement, then a newly arriving refugee will not be placed with their family residing in that state or locality. The refugee

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may relocate to that locality at any time after arrival; however, they will not have access to the initial resettlement services under the Department of State's Reception and Placement (R&P) Program. Minor children seeking to reunite with a parent or guardian may be additionally negatively impacted by a state or locality not consenting to resettlement.

It is our sincere hope that you will provide your written consent that will allow refugees to initially resettle and have access to R&P services in Fort Worth. Please provide your consent as soon as conveniently possible but no later than January 21 so that the State Department and refugee resettlement agencies can plan accordingly.